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581 born girl should marry a Dragalevtsy boy, she would make him get a job in Sofia and would not return with him to village life.

When a husband and wife born in different villages told their stories I once more began to believe in the improbable. These are typical accounts:

"I went to Kumaritsa to carry my sister's things since her husband was working at the railroad station. We stopped at a house where a niece was living with her uncle. When she heard that people from another village were at her house, she returned and found that she liked me and I liked her. We were both seventeen. Half a year later we married, during which time I came to see her only once. That means we had seen each other twice before we married."

"I met my wife when she was with her father selling onions near the Sofia *Obshtina*. This was on a Friday; the next day I went to get her from her village the other side of Sofia; the following day we were married in Dragalevtsy. The father agreed to this for I seemed to be her destiny."

584 The choice of a mate was not just an individual decision in Dragalevtsy, for the pressure on the part of relatives was steady and occasionally severe. At times the young people rebelled at this guidance but generally acquiesced, largely because they were so economically dependent upon their families. There were no professional matchmakers. In their stead some interested relative would take a hand at getting a daughter married off by seeing that a fitting young man was made conscious of the young woman's qualifications. This was often done so skillfully that the young man thought he had discovered the girl himself. In the 1930's the choice had to seem to originate with the young people, and there were few cases of families forcing their children into a marriage.

● 583 There were times when girls did marry against their will, but this was not because of parental command. These cases occurred when the bride was stolen without her consent. The actual stealing usually took place in the evening or late afternoon when the young man, assisted by companions, carried the girl from the fountain or the *boro* to his home. The girl's father was supposed immediately to hurry to the boy's home to ask if his daughter was willing to stay. The girl

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usually answered "Yes," since she had very little choice in the matter, even though she might be in love with someone else. One sixteen-year-old girl whom I knew had gone to Sofia to live until she was seventeen, when she married a young butcher there. Her family feared that if she had stayed in the village she would have been stolen by a local boy and been unable to marry the one upon whom she had set her heart. The stealing of the bride was a very common practice in the past, became incorporated in the marriage ritual, and was being revived for economic reasons during the period I studied Dragalevtsy. A stolen bride did not have to be married from her house with all the customary expensive ceremonies. She was married from the groom's house much more simply. Whether the bride agreed to a prearranged stealing or was the victim of a young man's sudden impulse, once she was taken to his home she dared not spurn his offer and return to her people. If she did, she would be in disgrace, with little possibility of a subsequent marriage.

Some of the stolen brides described their experiences in simple, matter-of-fact terms:

"In 1930 a group of us girls from Bistritsa had gone to the Monastery to card wool, and stayed there for a week. Some of the young bachelors from Dragalevtsy came up to see us two or three times and were with us for a long period on Sunday. My husband saw me working, liked me, and decided to capture me. He, with seven friends, waited outside the Monastery from eight o'clock to midnight knowing that I would have to go outside before going to bed. I came out with a *baba* [old woman] whom the boys frightened away with their guns; then I was taken down to Dragalevtsy. When we got to his home his mother and sisters met me in the yard with bread and salt ['so she wouldn't enter the house with empty hands,' interpolated the mother-in-law listening to the account]. The next day girls from Bistritsa went home and told my brothers that I had been stolen; they came here at eight o'clock that evening. I kissed their hands, gave them something to eat, and then they asked me if I wanted to stay or go back with them. I decided to stay, so they returned home."

The villagers described another traditional way of obtaining a bride, but I found that few young couples observed it. It involved a

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• 583 formal visit from some member of the boy's family, who brought the girl a hearthcake. If she and her parents accepted the proposal, the cake was eaten; then there was music and a general celebration. If the girl accepted but the parents did not agree, the guests went back home and sometime later on the girl ran away with the boy. Sometimes the girl knew the boy was sending a committee to ask for her hand; quite often she did not know. At times the young man himself made the request of the girl's father:

"We had known each other from childhood. He left bread and money for me to accept or reject, but my father turned him away, partly because I wanted to marry someone else in Simeonovo. He came, however, with three men, stole me, and wouldn't let me go."

A shy suitor acted differently:

"I was afraid to ask for her hand for fear she would refuse, so I got some older people to ask her married brothers, who agreed. Her parents were both dead and her brothers had been very strict with her, not allowing her to go to any *sedenki.*"

This last incident illustrated the popular idea that village young people are loath to discuss love and marriage with each other and do so by means of third parties. Such traditional going around Robin Hood's barn was being subjected to heavy strain by the young generation and, in fact, had always had its exceptions. "Stealing the bride" when both parties were in agreement is more correctly termed elopement; if the girl did not consent and the boy did not have the permission of her parents, then it was a case of actual stealing. Examples of elopements are:

"We were both from this village and had met at the fountain. We associated for two or three years, and one day while back on leave from the army I stole her with her agreement and then returned to the army. She stayed with my mother until I was again on leave a month and a half later, at which time we married."

"She was from Simeonovo and I met her one day as she was carrying nuts to the Friday market. Her father was a very unsympathetic man and did not approve of the match, so she ran away with me to Dragalevtsy, where we married and settled down in my father's home."

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The girls of Dragalevtsy had no way of proposing to a boy. The girl waited and, if nobody proposed to her, she remained unmarried.

Sometimes unmarried young people had sexual intercourse. If the boy did not want to marry the girl, then she told her parents; the boy was brought before the *Obshtina* and, if the charge was proved, was made to marry the girl. As one peasant said in matchless understatement: "In such cases they do not have a happy life."

One such case occurred during my sojourn in the village and was an exciting topic of conversation. A girl with an unsavory reputation, in the hope of gaining a certain young man as a husband, accused him of having had intimate relations with her; the parents, too, insisted upon his marrying their daughter. He refused and the matter was taken up before the village court, where several of his friends swore that they likewise had had intimate relations with the same girl. Whether the friends swore truthfully or falsely was still a matter of doubt in the minds of many villagers, but the young man was freed from all responsibility in the matter.

Chastity ranked high in the scale of village social values. Even though some couples had illicit relationships before they married, they were running a grave social risk. Public indignation was especially great in the case of illegitimacy. A girl giving birth to an illegitimate child was forced to leave the village. On this subject I had the following conversation with one of the more respected villagers:

"Where does the girl go if she is driven out of the village?"

"She goes to Sofia because she's a bad girl."

"Do the villagers try to find out who the father was and punish him for his part?"

"The father? Why should they? The girl is to blame, not the man."

"Are many illegitimate children born in the near-by villages?"

"In my time [the last thirty-five years] there have been two in Bistritsa, one in Dragalevtsy, and none in Simeonovo."

There was no particular stigma attached to being a widow or a widower, but the village mores decreed that, when remarrying, widows had to choose widowers, and vice versa. The explanation for this went back to the villagers' belief of the afterlife. They thought of

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178 234 began to compare the cost of feed with their income from milk and realized that they were losing money. As the war progressed the government bought more and more forage for military animals, feed costs went up, and dairying profits went down. Once this fact became evident and was noised throughout the village there was almost a wholesale withdrawal from dairying. Whereas three or four years before 1,300-1,400 kilos of milk were sold daily, by 1945 only 40 kilos were sold. The 1945 situation was aggravated by the excessively dry season and the reduced yield per cow from 15 liters daily down to 4 or 5. In other words, the number of cows fell off by as much as 90 per cent owing to the low prices of milk and feed difficulties. The peasants liked to mention the fact that *boza,* a fermented millet-seed drink which tastes like sour, liquefied chicken feed, sold for 40 leva a kilo and milk for only 22 leva.

178 233 The loss in dairying, temporary though it may prove to be, meant a corresponding gain in sheep-raising, with 1945 estimates of sheep numbers varying from 12,000 to 15,000. Sheep had also become popular because of the wool they made available for garments in the days of clothing shortage during and following the war. A return to sheep had created interesting social problems connected with pasturing. The sheepmen wanted to go back to the days when sheep could graze freely on uncultivated land, but many of the peasants wanted to keep pasturelands for their own use rather than common use.

178 593 As I talked to the peasants and heard the concerns expressed by the parents and the aspirations voiced by the young, I began to realize that the family trends already under way in 1937 had progressed further than I would have anticipated. Parents, although very much interested, had less to say about the choice of mates for their sons and daughters. Some of them were quite skillful in making use of relatives to advise the young people in choices which the older members of the family group considered wise.

583 178 593 Brides were still stolen but, contrary to the case in former years, the girl could return home immediately if dissatisfied with the man desiring to become her husband. Shortly before I visited the village a young man had "captured" the girl of his choice and taken her to his father's home. When the girl's parents came to ask whether she chose

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to return or remain, the girl decided to go back to her parents. In 1937 this would have made her ineligible, in a sense, for further consideration as a wife. Now she simply explained that when the boy had asked her in advance if she would marry him she had thought that he was joking and told him "Yes," in what she considered to be a jesting manner. She was greatly surprised two weeks later to find that the boy had been serious. The whole affair turned out happily in the end because within another two weeks the young man had found a willing girl, had become engaged to her, and married her.

Another evidence that the family system was having to change to meet the stress of new times was the lack of social disapproval shown to widows and widowers who married persons previously unmarried. Heretofore, only widows and widowers could marry each other, and this was chiefly because of economic necessity. Although not yet common, it was a growing practice for a widower to take a fancy to a girl whom he later married. The age of marriage was becoming lower, dropping to 18 and 19 years for many of the couples. The engagement period still lasted only one or two weeks, a time sufficient to allow the girl to make her wedding preparations.

Accompanying these changes was a greater freedom among the young people both in relation to each other and in relation to their parents. The *sedenki* for young people followed practically the same patterns which I had previously observed but had not yet popularized the kissing games which featured *sedenki* in northern Bulgaria. Clandestine love-making was increasing as was the tendency on the part of the young people to pair off.

The changed relationship of sons to their fathers was shown by the failure of many of the sons to turn over their earnings to their parents as part of the common family treasury. Formerly more than half of the young men had followed this practice, but estimates in 1945 placed the number at approximately one out of ten.

Of especial interest was the pattern which younger couples were establishing after marriage. Whereas, ten years ago even the young wife would have given implicit obedience to her husband's orders, today many of the families were becoming equalitarian. The older women, however, still clung to the patriarchal pattern, though they